6/29/72

Dear Jerry,

A copy of your letter to Harold arrived today. I have not spoken to Harold about it, and I don't know what he will do about it. I would like to write you about it in the hope that what I have to say might help you in your future, so that you might act more maturely and more fully aware of the responsibility you must bear for your acts.

First of all, let it be known that I utterly deplore what you did, and there is no way that I can justify it. Your letter, to me, is transparent. If it is truly a reflection of the way you think, then you have a long way to go before you are capable of mature, rational judgements.

You write "I also know that Gary got it independently from the Archives." That is not true. Gary did not get the death certificate independently, and I am shocked that he would tell you something like that (I do not know him, and know only of Harold's previous high regard for him). When Harold got the certificate, he sent a confidential copy to Gary for security purposes should anything happen to his copy. If Gary subseuqnetly ordered another copy from the Archives, what could his reason be? If you took Gary's word on this, you also did not do anything to find out from Harold or me if this were true.

Then you say, "after giving the matter a great deal of soul searching thought I decided that it was essential that Wecht be aware of Berkeley's (and you don't even spell the name right, it is Burkley) confirmation of the lower location of the back wound."You decided? On what basis, what information, what expertise did you decide what it was "essential" for Wecht to know? Jerry, you have admitted to me that you have not even read WHITEWASH, and we all know that your knowledge of the case is skimpy at best. So where do you all of a sudden get the qualifications which enable you to decide what Wecht should know? I don't know what you found when you "searched" your "soul," but you surely couldn't have found the knowledge or experience to enable you to make such a decision. Know your limits, man. It's not so awful that you don't know enough about the case, but how can you live with yourself knowing you took this responsibility on yourself without the proper knowledge or understanding.

Again, "As much as I have tried to understand why it is important that Wecht½ not be given acess..., I cannot persuade myself that you are right." Fine. But you don't know enough to be able to decide one way or the other who is right. You are entitled to your opinion, but you are not entitled to go around screwing up other people's work because of your uninformed opinion.

"If that danger is real, it is even more real should Wecht go in unprepared and unbriefed." If Wecht needs the help of others, especially you, so that he is not "unprepared" when he goes in, then what the hell is he doing going in anyway? How can he be "unprepared" if he is a forensic pathologist? Can't he read photos and X-rays? And again I ask, who are you to decide how Wecht is to be "prepared"?

So you went to Gary, not to Harold or me, and discussed the matter with him. You should know that Gary has not been working on this for a long time. Why did you not consult me at least? You have brought up the death certificate with me before, and I told you then that you did not understand it, that it had much more importance than just placing the back wound. But still you consider yourself the expert. And Gary "did send it, outlining to Wecht the history of it, how it was released as a result of your presairing Kelly..." Now it so happens that the history of how this was released is unquestionably Harold's literary property and he has a legal right to that. Gary had no business passing that info on to Wecht without Harold's permission.

Then you say that you sent a copy to Sylvia. Sylvia isn't going to see the pictures and X-rays. Even despite that shoddy rationalization which God alone gave you the expertise to devise, where does Sylvia come in? How is she entitled to this? "Because Sylvia and Wecht are close?" If Wecht has it from Gary, why does he need it again from Sylvia? And with Sylvia feeling as she does and as you know she does about Harold "sitting on" his work?

And let me tell you something else, Mr. Divine Judgement. Had you bothered to search for reliable facts instead of that soul which better be aching now, you would have found out that Harold immediately told Wecht about the death certificate, in ~~XXXXXXXX~~ confidence. So even on that basis, Wecht did not need the "help" which you deemed "essential" he get.

But I stop a minute. You sent Sylvia a copy? What, may I ask, are you doing with a copy? Who sent it to you? Gary? For all the bullshit excuses you've offered, there is nothing that justifies you having a copy. You are not going to see the autopsy pictures. You are not "close" to Wecht. You cannot with your lack of competence "prepare" him. So I ask you, what possible need do you have for the death certificate? It cannot be to enhance your knowledge, for you don't even have the knowledge to understand it, and with it in your possession, you still can't even spell Burkley's name right!

Next to last graph, you repeat that Nazi-sounding "I did what I felt I had to do," and then say "If those photos have been falsified and Wecht were to gain access, I think we would be guilty of something pretty terrible were we to deny Wecht the means of proving forgery when that proof exists." Oh, you gotta be kidding! How is the death certificate going to help prove "foregery"? If the pix show the back wound in a different location, how can we prove that Burkley was not mistaken? And how do you all of a sudden get the expertise to decide whether or not the pictures will be able to corroborate the death certificate. It so happens the death certificate syas something that pictures cannot confirm with precision, but you don't have the technical competence to know that. Only you have the gall, be it self-righteous or not, to make these important decisions in spite of your lack of knowledge. And who, Jerry, has suggested that these dare by forgeries? Sylvia perhaps? Or maybe even that Lifton, an untrastworthy SOB who you have deigned worthy of "preparing" Wecht. After the Panel Report, there was no chance of forgeries. But again, this is all above you, and you have to know it. Whatever your professed sense of right and wrong, was it "right" for you to make these vital decisions on the basis of your incompetence? Can you justify that?

You claim to know Sylvia well enough to know "that she would never dream of using" the death cer tificate. Then why did you give it to her? Was she not to "use" it with Wecht? And let me tell you something about Sylvia's "dreams"—she would "dream" of using it because she declared to me that it was "public domain." So you can eat your words if the death certificate should appear on the pages of the Texas Observer or some other obscure source where it will be seen and read by no one but who she sends it to and the government, but if this is published would you consider paying Harold the infinite cost of the damage it will do to his work?

I am totally unimpressed when you write "I amde that death certificate available to Cyril because in good conscience I couldn't do anything else." If that is your good conscience, I can tell you only to start looking for a new conscience. And do you mean to tell me that "in good conscience" you could not have called me and solicited my advice? Or Harold? In good conscience you could not consult Harold about something which is the most important thing he and he all by himself dug up, and which you didn't even understand? In "good conscience" you had to do this all behind not only Harold's back, but behind my back? Your "good conscience" enabled you to face Harold and go to his home after you did this?

You say "the case is important to me also." If that is true, why do you risk anything when your knowledge is not sufficient? If it is so important to you, why don't you but out where you don't belong. Sure you helped Harold with publicity for F-U, and sure you did good research on the Times. But you yourself know that you know so little about the case itself. So, I say you don't belong in a position where you make the kind of decisions you have. You are not in a position to know what Wecht should know; you are not in a position to pass judgement on Harold's work.

Today you shocked me further when you revealed that you had called Lifton. A man with Lifton's record, his irresponsibilities, his kookiness, his connection with Liebeler, Newcomb, Thompson, and who knows what else. Not to mention a man with an utter hatred for Harold. And this is virtually all Harold's work. Even for your lack of knowledge, you knew enough in this case for me to say that you consciously made a lousy, stinking decision. Why didn't you just call that nut George Thompson and have Wecht "prepared" to confirm that JFK is still alive? To me, calling Lifton amounts to the same thing. If you thought it was so goddamned important for Wecht to be "prepared" so he doesn't mess this up, I can't conceive of how you ever came to Lifton. Do we now look forward to a press conference held in a paper mache tree, with 17 men of different sizes hidden in it?

I mean to be hard on you, because I think you have done something very bad and you have to confront it and learn from it. I think, in the least, you acted so irresponsibly that it would not be in Harold's interests ever to trust you with any information again. Harold cannot afford it, when he has friends whose uniformed consciences lead them to do such things.

This letter is more harsh than almost any I have written. I am angry now, and disappointed. But when I look over it, I cannot find one thing in it that did not deserve to be said or that you should not be confronted with. You might resent all this coming from me, but that is irrelevant to me. I have not let my age interfere with my involvement in the case except to respect the limitations of but 19 years of experience to fall back on. I do feel there is a moral and ethical issue to face which so far you have not. You, like so many others, have simply got to come to grips with your "good conscience." You have to think more, know and respect your own limits, and have more consideration for the interests (not to mention the feelings) of others. You have to face the fact that it is irrelevant that you meant well; you acted irresponsibly.

I hate to repeat old sayings, but one could not be more relvant: The road to hell is paved with good intentions.

Best,

Howard

cc. Harold